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Here's Looking At ... Library-Based Profiling: The Real New Business Model ... A Plan to Reinvigorate Library/Vendor Relations

by **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer** (Partners, R2 Consulting)
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In recent months, the pages of *Against the Grain* have been filled with fulminations on “new business models,” “unbundling” of services, the present and future of eBooks, and the need for vendors to make a profit. Underlying all this commentary is a passionate plea for librarians to place higher value on the work of the vendors that serve them. Instead of lamenting the current circumstance, it's time to recreate the role of the vendor so that its value is obvious.

The library-vendor relationship is overly complex. Approval vendors now provide Web databases and tools, training, profile building and maintenance, fund code mapping, selection records, electronic ordering, local data management, direct and third-party cataloging services, physical processing, delivery, and customer service for all of the above. Some vendors have managed to perform these tasks well, but at significant cost. Some have been unable or unwilling to compete on these terms. This has led to consolidation among vendors—and limited choices for libraries.

The few remaining full-service vendors are overwhelmed with requests for enhancements to their Web systems, increased demands for customization, the need to support consortia, and the operational challenges of network speed and stability in a 24 x 7 world. The two largest companies are deeply absorbed in merging and retrofitting legacy systems and processes, promising synergies—eventually. This leaves them little opportunity to design a new generation of services.

React! We're interested in comments for or against, refinements, calumny, or quibbles, either directed to us or to ATG.

We believe they don't have to. We believe it's time to simplify the library-vendor relationship. Specifically, we believe it's time for an entirely new model for profiling services—one that is completely independent of book delivery. One that incorporates profiling of eBooks. One that increases cooperation among libraries, book vendors, publishers, and ILS vendors, through a new entity: profiling providers. Let's call our new model “Library-Based Profiling,” to emphasize its return of control to libraries.

At its core, an approval plan is a screening service for newly published monographs. The profile identifies relevant new content, and the vendor notifies libraries of its availability. In the traditional approval model, the book vendor also delivers the book, and so performs three functions: identification, notification, and delivery.

With Library-Based Profiling, these primary functions are separated. A library contracts with a profiling provider for identification and notification, and with book vendor(s) for delivery. This renders the profile independent of book vendor relationships and allows more specialized attention to both profiling and fulfillment.

Innovation results naturally from such specialization. A profiling provider would create new Web-based profiling tools; incorporate eBooks into the new title stream; involve library-based selectors in qualitative judgments on new titles; identify “core” materials; build a more academic database; and develop reporting tools.

The profiling provider would work with libraries and ILS vendors to optimize data delivery, in the form of MARC “Send” records; MARC “Notify” records, and ultimately, eBooks themselves. The profiling provider would work with book vendors to output complete, easy-to-process orders, and to pass through local data necessary for correct invoicing and cataloging.

Meanwhile, book vendors would focus on speed of fulfillment, discount, increased automation, improved status reporting, inventory specialization, print-on-demand and other initiatives that would increase the likelihood of filling orders from inventory. They would continue to improve cataloging and physical processing efficiency. Book vendors now lacking approval plan capability would become competitive again. Book vendors who now support approval plans could reduce their costs.

Library-Based Profiling would have these additional characteristics:

- Print and eBook versions of same content would be linked in database;
- Wizard-style profile-building tool for library selectors;
- “What If” capability, profile modeling, retrospective, and estimate-creation tools;
- Synoptic profile(s) and activity reports: single profile, but multiple vendors;
- Duplication control across multiple vendors;
- Consortial services;
- A national network of library-based academic selectors;
- Analysis and description of new book and eBook content;
- Designation (by library experts) of “core” titles;
- Substantial, well-written annotations for key titles;
- The Definitive Academic database;
- ILS-friendly selection and notification records;
- Book vendor profile to direct dispersion of orders;
- Formatted order records to library's book vendor(s) of choice.

The benefits of the new model:

- Profile applies to print books and eBooks;
- Profiles are Library-Based rather than Vendor-Based;
- Introduction of Library-Based profiles will not disrupt existing relationships—cooperative implementation is possible;
- Librarians have more choice and more control, greater flexibility;
- Libraries can change vendors without rewriting profiles;
- Compensates for diminishing time and knowledge of library selectors;
- Separates complexity of selection from distribution—applies intelligence to the power of massive distribution systems;
- Reinvigorates market because smaller vendors can compete for “approval” business;
- Smaller vendors could develop specialties by stocking small presses, associations, etc.;
- Publishers benefit from highly-targeted marketing;
- Cooperative approach—Libraries, book vendors, publishers, ILS vendors, and profiling providers each have a role.

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Profiles Encouraged

■ ■ ■ **Rick Anderson**
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Born when and where: 1965 in Palo Alto, CA (but raised since infancy in the Boston area)

Current residence: Greensboro, NC

Education: B.S. (1991) and M.L.I.S. (1993) from Brigham Young University

Summary of job experience: Bibliographic searcher/inputter, then section supervisor in the Acquisitions Department at BYU's Lee Library (1988-1993); bibliographer at Yankee Book Peddler (1993-1997); Head Acquisitions Librarian at UNC Greensboro (1997-present).

Family: Wife Laura Wolz, kids Maggie (7), Bryan (4) and Tucker (1)

Most recent accomplishment: My first speaking honorarium

Most recent goal attained: Joined the staff of Bluegrass Unlimited Magazine

First job: Scooping ice cream at Brigham's in Harvard Square

Fondest memory: Having ten dollars in my pocket and knowing I could buy any record in the store that I wanted; then spending hours trying to choose between Fred Frith, Joe Val and Pere Ubu

Favorite pastime: Listening to 1970s-era reggae while reading hard-boiled detective fiction

Hobbies: Reading, writing, guitar, banjo, Irish flute, bodhran

Last book read or literary tastes: Right now I'm reading Robert Conquest's *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, but mostly I'm a Robert B. Parker/James Lee Burke kind of guy.

Pet peeves: Tribalism, cant and rah-rah

What would you like to be doing five years from now? Playing a genuine Irish flute, a Martin HD-28 guitar, a Bart Reiter Whyte Laydie banjo (with the gryphon peghead inlay) and putting away enough money to get my kids through college. (Hmmm ... I may have to make some choices ...)

Had I but world enough and time: I'd write fewer reviews and more music, and I'd practice a lot more.

Single most important piece of advice: Question your own motives at all times.

Biggest surprise: The fierceness and intensity of parental love. I expected it to be deep and strong; I didn't expect it to shake me like a rag. 🐼

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be unknown in a decade. Ten years from now, scholars appear likely to prefer their monographs, particular in STM and many social sciences, in electronic form only. The library building will house an increasingly humanities-only collection of books. What will happen, then, to book jobbers when so much of the service they provide deals with a physical item? Why shouldn't libraries expect that we will submit the order directly to the publisher using the new 13-digit ISBN and the publisher will FTP the work back to us in seconds. Developments in EDI fund transfer will make the jobber's previous place at the hub of the academic monograph publications wheel less important. If jobbers continue to exist to serve university libraries, they will be handling a shrinking number of paper scholarly titles and likely will be handling the still lively market in trade books. A growth area for jobbers will be the domain of rights management and handling copyright permissions.

Not to worry about these acquisitions is not to take lightly the importance of book vending. Speedy and fiscally simple means of buying books is very important to any library. What might librarians prepare for rather than being concerned about these recent actions? Is it likely that book jobbers will begin to behave like serials agents, particularly in assessing a surcharge rather than selling at a discount. Book jobbers have developed costly Web-based data manipulation engines to assist collection managers and acquisitions librarians in querying about their profiles and accounts. These have traditionally been provided at no charge. The future will probably include annual fees for the more powerful features to allow jobbers to recoup development costs. What about the level of service? To meet the demands of competition, book jobbers, known for their high-touch service, will likely begin to resemble the phone company model where reaching inside and finding a living human being is difficult.

So there is plenty about which to worry, but these acquisitions are not the focus. The next stage of book acquisition will be different and librarians need to keep their eyes open and throw our weight/budgets around in a calculated way to get what we need from the new book vending relationships. 🐼

¹With apologies to Stanley Kubrick and to Dr. Strangelove wherever they are.

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Yes, this means libraries would pay for profiling. It also means that profiling could be improved much more quickly. If a good profiling system can identify "core" titles, perhaps a library can spend less time on selection. If an enhanced profiling system can reduce the time spent writing, monitoring, and revising approval plans, that time can be reallocated. If library-based profiling can reduce the costs of some vendors, a portion of those savings could offset the cost of profiling. ILS vendors could view this as a collection development module, fitted to their systems. Publishers could see it as highly targeted marketing to likely buyers, worth at least a single copy from which to profile.

Can it work? We believe it can, both operationally and economically. Is it a good idea? We think so; that's why we're putting it out for comment. What's it worth? That's for the market to determine, but we believe it can more than pay for itself. We're interested in comments for or against, refinements, calumny, or quibbles, either directed to us or to ATG. 🐼